

The
View
FROM

高溪園
HIGH FALLS GARDENS

Dear Friends of High Falls Gardens,

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NAOMA Presentation

This past autumn and solstice have borne more than the usual nostalgia, being loaded with all that cumbersome, end-of-an-era baggage. Even the confusion over when the twentieth century actually ends — this past Dec. 31st or next? — seems part of the pervasive magical thinking that's pumping up the Internet stocks. Although those of us in the medicinal plant cultivation world are already facing the painful realities of the future, perhaps as the broader collective we are still looking backwards, trying to anchor ourselves with familiar ways of seeing while feeling the ground shift under our feet.

Despite the dangers that lie ahead, we have been heartened by the rapidly growing strength of the organic farming and community-supported agriculture movements as well as by the resistance to irresponsible commercial applications of biotechnology. The establishment media like to portray the resistance as a ragged band of hippies, Luddites and children in monarch butterfly costumes battling against men in white lab coats. The strength of the resistance, however, is based on superior science — science that is more faithful to Mother Nature — and over the long term our arguments will prevail. Whether any of us will be around to share the prize is another issue.

As The Hive Turns

At the end of the last episode of our ongoing apiarian cliff-hanger, all the heroes were dead. But it seems this story is magical realism and not tragedy. Believe it or not, over the summer the HFG supers were replenished despite our ineptitude. Nature in her beneficence rewards even novices.

Readers may remember that our lovely first colony failed to thrive, having succumbed (probably) to Varroa mites and dwindling down to nothing by June. The supers, containing frames with honey still in them, were taken out of the field, dragged back to the house and stacked right outside the barn/garage. Over the summer we noticed bees working those supers, but we just assumed they were cleaning out the frames and taking the honey back to their own colonies. And besides, we were too busy to pay close attention.

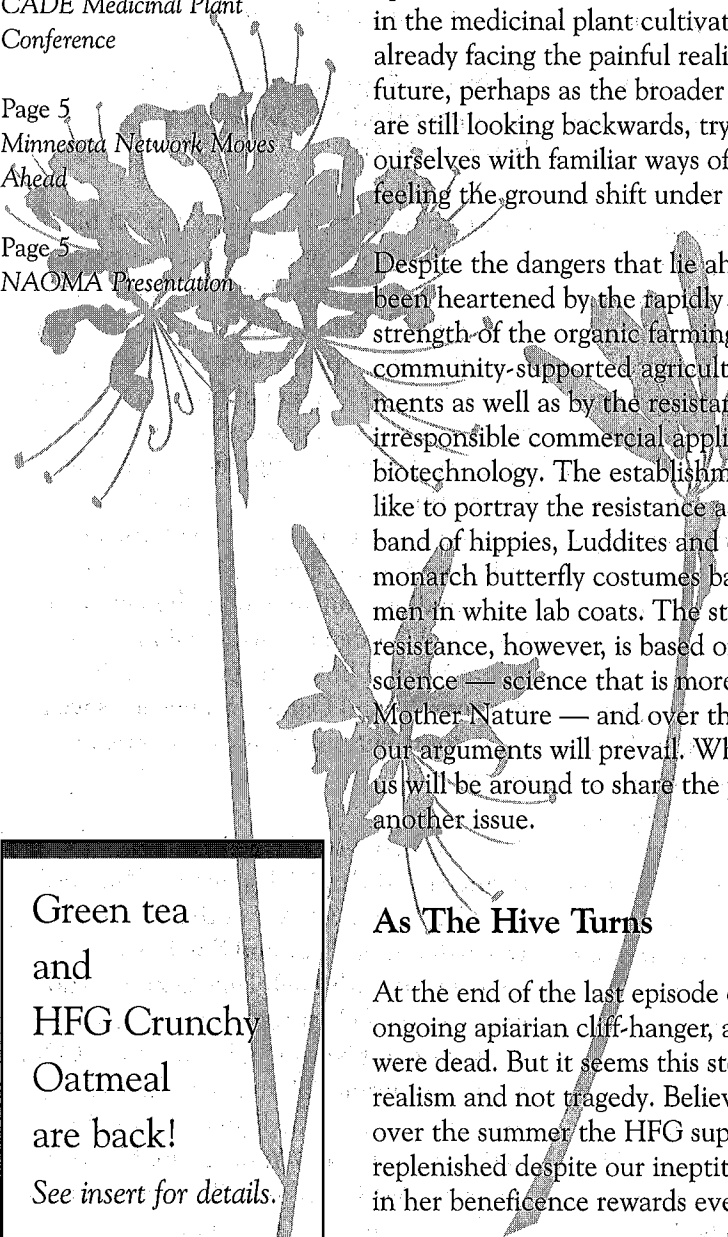
We consoled ourselves by phoning Champlain Valley Bees and Queens in Middlebury, Vermont, and reserving two colonies for May 2000. "Most of our customers come on Mother's Day to pick up," explained owner Kirk Webster, "We try to make a workshop out of it." Sounds like fun!

However, by the end of August it was obvious that the supers left in the driveway had been colonized. Yes, someone else's bees had swarmed or split off and had been attracted by those honey residues. Expert beekeepers affirmed that bees can smell honey from miles away. It was a gift from heaven! The only problem is, they're right at the top of the driveway, and inside the Village where zoning laws prohibit "farm animals," including honeybees. Consulting the experts again, we learned that the colony cannot be moved during the season. The precise location of those supers is imprinted in the field workers' brains, and they will navigate by the sun and return to that exact spot until their death. The solution is to move the supers in the middle of winter, when the bees are dormant and right before the queen starts laying again for

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Green tea
and
HFG Crunchy
Oatmeal
are back!

See insert for details.



The View FROM
HIGH FALLS GARDENS
P.O. Box 125
Philmont, NY 12565 USA

Jean Giblette, *Publisher*

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For further information contact
High Falls Gardens,
P.O. Box 125,
Philmont, NY 12565 USA
phone 518-672-7365
or email hfg@capital.net.

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DEAR FRIENDS

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spring buildup. Then, the next generation of field bees will imprint on the new location.

Three Winners Bear Fruit

Among the most exciting Garden events this past autumn, the *Schisandra chinensis* and the *Trichosanthes kirilowii* bore fruit for the first time, while the *Lycium chinense* bushes were absolutely loaded with berries. These three are especially interesting crops and, while the potential for commercial production is yet to be determined, the appearance of plump fruit seems promising.

This past year was the third season in the garden for these plants. The *Schisandra*, *wu wei zi*, "five-flavor seed" or magnolia vine fruit, is dioecious and a climbing vine that bears on old wood. HFG received unsexed plants from Forest Farm Nursery in Washington state and was fortunate. The cluster of berries was near the ground, indicating that the vines have to be protected from winter kill and should perhaps be trained on low trellises, like grapevines. The fruit has a complex flavor that is said to encompass all the tastes recognized in Five Element Theory; however, in treatment it is categorized as Sour and Warm, used to Stabilize and Bind, and has Heart/Kidney/Lung channel affinities.

The *Trichosanthes*, a perennial cucumber, bloomed for the first time in 1998. Its large white cucurbit-style flowers with lacy edges and a heavenly scent seemed to go unrecognized by our pollinators, so this year we tried hand-pollinating. There was more fruit than merited by our efforts — obviously someone else figured it out. This marvelous plant yields four medicinal fractions — seed, skin/husk, fruit pulp and root.

The *Lycium*, known as wolfberry or matrimony vine, is the source of two medicinals — the bright red berries, *gou qi zi*, sold like raisins in Chinese supermarkets, and the root bark, *di gu pi*, "earth bone bark."

Most of these medicinals in commerce are *L. barbarum* from south China. We tried growing material from several sources, including cutting open the red berries from the Chinatown pharmacy, removing the seeds and sprouting them. However, our most productive plants are from material collected by Robert Newman in Suzhou, at Zhou Zheng Garden. This is *L. chinense*, the species grown in northern China. Pruning of the bushes is important to stimulate fruit production — yet another of the many cultivation arts to be learned. Although classified as Sweet, Neutral and used to Supplement the Blood, the berries have a mild taste and are good for snacks while working in the garden.

Chinese Agronomist's Visit Rescheduled for May and June of 2000

As we go to press, Wu Zhongfa is on his way to the U.S. Consulate in Guangzhou, current paperwork in hand, to claim that visa denied him last year after the embassy bombing. (See Spring/Summer 1999 issue of *The View*.) His team of hosts in the U.S. is once again putting together an awesome itinerary designed to significantly enhance international cooperation in medicinal plant conservation and cultivation. The visit is on for this coming May and June, with funding contributed by the Guangxi Botanical Garden of Medicinal Plants, where Mr. Wu holds the post of Senior Agronomist and Garden Manager, as well as by contributions from the American group.

The University of Massachusetts at Amherst is the official sponsor of Mr. Wu's visit. Dr. Lyle E. Craker of the UMass Department of Plant and Soil Sciences is cooperating with High Falls Gardens and its network of plant specialists centered around Robert Newman, L.Ac., M.S.T.O.M., to plan a substantial number of activities, including tours of medicinal plant cultivation areas in New York, Ohio, Missouri and the West Coast as well as excursions to see native species in the wild.

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CADE Sponsors Medicinal Plant Conference, Receives Funding for Second Year of Trials

A new agricultural development project begun last year in central New York has taken an innovative, cooperative approach to medicinal plant cultivation. The Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship (CADE), based in Otsego County, found an ingenious way to fund a pilot project to trial fifteen species during the 1999 season. They celebrated the harvest with a conference in Cooperstown on October 30 that attracted over 130 eager growers and featured Jean Giblette of High Falls Gardens as keynote speaker. A second round of funding for 2000 has already been secured. CADE's story is instructive, suggesting new pathways for 21st century agricultural entrepreneurship.

Upstate Myths and Realities

A drive into central New York state, along mile after mile of rolling fields with tidy farms nestled in the hollows, can sometimes feel like a time warp back to our agrarian past. Then inevitably, the sight of an ancient barn collapsing inward interrupts the illusion of stable prosperity. Here, as elsewhere throughout the country, the farmers that remain are tough survivors with family members working off farm and searching for a way to preserve their inheritance.

Here also, some of those who remain are relaxing their notorious independence enough to work together to seek common solutions to problems. The CADE

story begins in Otsego County about ten years ago, when educators Gary Turits and Kevin Hodne (Mr. Hodne was also at that time a county legislator) were trying to come up with ideas for local economic development. Agriculture, being even today the biggest industry in several New York counties including Otsego, became their focus and, with a grant from a local foundation, they formed CADE as an educational and marketing assistance unit for farmers to make their operations more profitable. Equipped with a mission statement encompassing research, education and marketing assistance, as well as a strategic plan, Turits and Hodne hired an executive director. This person turned out to be none other than Annie Farrell, creator of *Annie's Elegant Vegetables* in Delaware County, who in the late 'eighties had pioneered direct sales of produce into New York City markets, was profiled most engagingly in the *New York Times*, and inspired other farmers to follow her example.

That was the beginning. After several years of experience, CADE became adept at technical assistance and gained a substantial reputation for innovation. With an emphasis on sustainability, the organization supports a local label, "CAP" (Cooperstown Area Products), the Oneonta Farmers' Market, a pastured poultry operation, meadow-

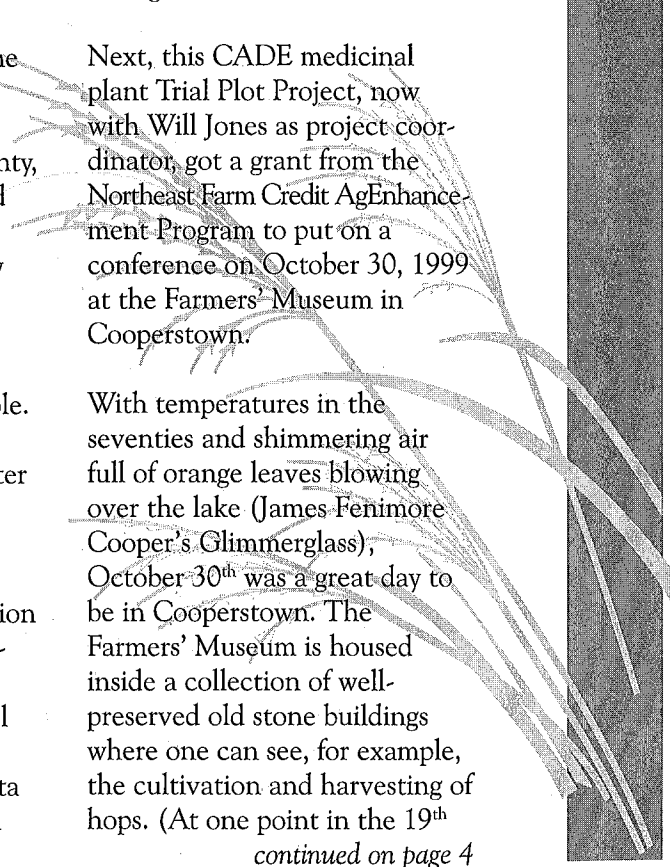
raised veal, a revolving loan fund and various educational projects.

In 1998, CADE was approached by Barry Graham of Graham Development Corporation, a local pharmaceuticals firm, and staff of the Hartwick College Chemistry Department to do a medicinal plant cultivation project. This teamwork then persuaded the Otsego County Industrial Development Agency to award CADE \$20,000 for a pilot study during the 1999 growing season. Twelve local farmers contributed land and labor to grow out fifteen species of medicinal plants, mostly "Western" herbs but also including *Angelica sinensis* and *Astragalus membranaceus*.

Next, this CADE medicinal plant Trial Plot Project, now with Will Jones as project coordinator, got a grant from the Northeast Farm Credit AgEnhancement Program to put on a conference on October 30, 1999 at the Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown.

With temperatures in the seventies and shimmering air full of orange leaves blowing over the lake (James Fenimore Cooper's Glimmerglass), October 30th was a great day to be in Cooperstown. The Farmers' Museum is housed inside a collection of well-preserved old stone buildings where one can see, for example, the cultivation and harvesting of hops. (At one point in the 19th

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CADE PROJECT

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century, 80% of the hops produced in the U.S. was grown within 40 miles of Cooperstown.) The facilities were comfortable for the group of about 150 (including staff) and the food, featuring local bounty and prepared by Clare's Cornucopia of Cooperstown, was excellent.

Cooperstown is a classic small town in a lovely pastoral setting, a place where people come to worship baseball and other great American myths. Boasting a now-rare, healthy main street, this village of pristine Victorian homes is bordered by neatly tilled fields, the typical sprawling ranch-house, strip-mall fringe being noticeably absent. Of course, one has to drive twenty miles south to see a movie, but perhaps if a community can so skillfully manufacture and sustain its own myths there is no need to import them from Hollywood.

Partnership, Value-Added are Keys to Profitability

CADE is dedicated to insuring that New York farmers will continue to be a strong presence, and not just a glory of the past memorialized in a wonderful museum. "There are huge markets throughout the Northeast, and yet we have vacant farmland," observed Kevin Hodne. "The challenge is to connect farms to markets. CADE is looking to help develop the entrepreneurial farmer. This farmer has a diversity of products,

selects or emphasizes products based on market demands, and also has a diversity of markets. This is hard for one person to do, and easier in association with other farmers."


Noting that the four most important elements for agricultural economic development are market research, direct marketing, quality production and education, Mr. Hodne described the thinking behind the focus on medicinal plant production. "Our market research showed opportunities for sales and production in the medicinal plant market, but we found that quality is an essential concern. Our 1999 trials proved that we can produce top-quality medicinal herbs here. Also, certain volumes are necessary to satisfy the minimum requirements of the buyers. For the summer of 2000 we selected three medicinals based on the trials — Valerian, Echinacea and Feverfew. Farmers will grow an acre of each and will market them."

The second year's study is funded by a \$40,000 grant from the Empire State Development Corporation, a New York state economic development agency which does limited work in agriculture. Participating farmers must be organic and will receive technical assistance in production methods from CADE, which will also help purchase seed and produce the greenhouse starts, support the formation of the growers' association and

establish links with markets. CADE will assist the association in selling the crops, and a portion of the profits will be reserved for third-year activities. It is hoped that by this means the growers' association will become self-supporting over time.

CADE's ten-year vision, according to Mr. Hodne, is to help entrepreneurs begin more agricultural processing businesses. Processing is a value added to the act of growing and harvesting a crop, and contributes substantially to profitability. The revolving loan fund CADE created in cooperation with the Otsego County Economic Development agency will support farmers in these endeavors.

High Falls Gardens shares CADE's vision of healthy farms providing top-quality food and plant medicines for the kind of health care people really want and need. The two organizations have agreed to work closely together in making this dream a reality.

Tracey Snyder is now the field consultant for CADE's dynamic new effort. Will Jones, now back in graduate school, will continue as the project's lead technical consultant. Ms. Snyder and Keith Botts, current executive director of CADE, can be reached at 607-286-7372, or write the CADE Medicinal Plant Project, P.O. Box 51, Milford, NY 13807. 

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